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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003164

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: PREL MARR PARM MOPS PGOV LE UK FR

SUBJECT: SECURITY SECTOR COORDINATION: PROCEEDING WITH
INFORMAL CHANNELS

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Prime Minister Siniora, Deputy Prime and Defense Minister Murr, and French Ambassador Emie all agree: despite rumors to the contrary, Emie was not the cause of Siniora's rejection of a UK-led security sector reform and coordination unit in his office. The three argue that the UK had unrealistic expectations as to what Siniora, under constant attack for allegedly handing away Lebanon's sovereignty, could accept. While the PM was too polite to say no, he insists he never accepted the UK offer. Siniora is equally determined to reject any EU coordination unit on security issues, and Emie reported that an upcoming ESDP team will strive only to improve coordination among EU member states on security cooperation. In the place of the coordination unit, three informal channels on security sector coordination and reform are emerging. First, the US, UK, and select other missions (but, notably, not France) are already meeting discreetly to compare notes, coordinate, and work on deconfliction, on both police and army issues. Second, Murr told us that he will play an increasingly active gatekeeper and coordinator role, in support in particular of maintaining a predominately U.S.-origin equipment foundation base for the LAF. Third, Emie agreed with our proposal that the US and French embassies meet quietly but regularly on security sector reform and coordination. End summary.

¶2. (S) The Ambassador met with Emie on 9/28 to ask about his objections to the security sector reform and coordination unit proposed by UK General Andrew Mackay. Expressing exasperation that he was being unfairly blamed, Emie denied that he was behind the death of the idea. While Mackay's proposal looked sensible, Emie said, it was "completely unrealistic." Can you imagine what the pro-Syrians would do, Emie asked, if there were foreign military advisors in the Grand Serail (seat of the premier)? Already under attack for allegedly handing away Lebanon's sovereignty to western imperialists, Siniora could not afford such a unit politically. Siniora has faced repeated charges that he fails to protect Lebanese sovereignty, and the Mackay mission would have added fuel to the fire.

¶3. (S) Siniora, meeting with the Ambassador on 9/21 (with other topics covered septel), agreed that Emie had nothing to do with his rejection of an idea that the PM described as not feasible politically. The Ambassador noted that the British had the impression after Tony Blair's visit that Siniora was comfortable with the approach, which would have maintained a Lebanese lead at all times. Thus we found it curious that, subsequently, Siniora cooled to the idea. The PM said that we, and the British, took politeness for acquiescence. "Who

can say no to Tony Blair's face?" Siniora said. Asked about the upcoming European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) team, Siniora said that, if the team asked to help with a unit in the Grand Serail, he would more explicitly say no.

¶4. (S) Emie told the Ambassador that the ESDP team was never intended to replace the Mackay mission, as the U.S and UK have suspected. The ESDP team will not propose assisting in establishing and staffing a GOL security sector reform and coordination unit. Instead, the ESDP team will look at how to improve intra-EU security policy. There is very little communication and coordination and much duplication between EU states in this area, Emie said, so the ESDP team will propose solutions. The ESDP team will also look at where to put any EU funds toward security sector reform. The ESDP team will definitely want to meet with the Americans, he said.

¶5. (S) The Ambassador responded to Emie that, even if Siniora couldn't accept a coordination unit with foreign advisors for political reasons, the problem of coordination and setting priorities remains. Emie agreed. He proposed that our two embassies start sharing more information and ideas. The Ambassador noted that such coordination would be welcome. In fact, the Ambassador noted, we already have such relations with the UK Embassy, and the lack of the same relationship with the French had more to do with French attitudes than American attitudes. Emie concurred on the need for "openness and transparency." Joint U.S.-French understandings will help persuade the Lebanese to move in certain directions, he said. But he emphasized that he opposed any kind of formal mechanism, even among donors without GOL involvement, for the unwelcome attention it would get locally. "And don't forget," Emie said, "we now have 2,000 troops on the ground." Repeating his worries about the appearance of westerners dictating Lebanon's security policy,

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Emie said that he did not want to give any pretext for attacks on the French UNIFIL contingent.

¶6. (S) In a 9/29 meeting with the Ambassador, Defense Minister Murr shared Emie and Siniora's analysis, that it would be "political suicide" for Siniora to invite Mackay or the ESDP team to establish a unit in the Grand Serail. Murr also said that he would not accept such a unit in the Ministry of Defense. However, he would be happy to work with donors individually or collectively, as long the mechanism is discreet and informal, on coordination and reform. In fact, Murr said, he will work to play a bigger gatekeeper and coordination role himself. While he trusts his generals working with U.S. military experts from ODC and visitors from CENTCOM to make the right decisions, he knows that there must be some discipline regarding what is requested or accepted from others. Murr said that his interest was maintaining the U.S.-origin foundation of the LAF, and he would not accept non-complementary donations of equipment from the French and others.

¶7. (S) Comment: We suspect that there may be more to the dismissal of the Mackay proposals than what Siniora, Emie, and Murr told us. But, nevertheless, with increased polarization of political rhetoric in Lebanon over the past two weeks, we agree that it is now politically unfeasible to proceed with an idea that looked so sensible only a month ago. Such a unit would essentially give a political gift to those pro-Syrian Lebanese politicians, Hezbollah, and General Aoun to increase their attacks on Siniora. But the lack of a centralized security sector reform and coordination unit leaves those of us on the ground with an enormous gap to fill. In fact, the U.S., UK, Germany, Canada, and others are already meeting informally to compare notes and coordinate our approaches on security sector assistance and reform, both to the police and the LAF. The French are not part of this but could be brought in later. We will also test the seriousness of Emie's offer to coordinate bilaterally. As for Murr, we believe that he will best be brought in if and

when we need a trouble-shooter. In addition, our access to him is easy and good, so we will be able to help script him for a Gulf fundraising tour he plans for the post-Ramadan period. End comment.

FELTMAN